

Abkhaz language

Abkhaz (/æbˈkɑːz/^[3] /æpˈhɑːz/^[4] sometimes spelled **Abxaz**; Аԥсуа бызшәа IPA: [apʰswa bɪzʃʷa], also known as **Abkhazian**,^{[2][5][6]} is a Northwest Caucasian language most closely related to Abaza. It is spoken mostly by the Abkhaz people. It is one of the official languages of Abkhazia,^[a] where around 100,000 people speak it.^[1] Furthermore, it is spoken by thousands of members of the Abkhazian diaspora in Turkey, Georgia's autonomous republic of Adjara, Syria, Jordan, and several Western countries. The Russian census of 2010 reported 6,786 speakers of Abkhaz in Russia.^[7]

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Classification

Abkhaz is a Northwest Caucasian language and is thus related to Adyghe. It is especially close to Abaza, and they are sometimes considered dialects of the same language, Abazgi, of which the literary dialects of Abkhaz and Abaza are simply two ends of a dialect continuum. Grammatically, the two are very similar; however, the differences in phonology are substantial and are the main reason for many other linguists preferring to keep the two separate. Most linguists (instance, Chirikba 2003) believe that Ubykh is the closest relative to the Abkhaz–Abaza dialect continuum.

Geographical distribution

Abkhaz is spoken primarily in Abkhazia. Abkhaz is also spoken by members of the large Abkhaz Muhajir diaspora, mainly located in Turkey, with smaller groups living in Syria, Iraq, and Jordan; the Georgian autonomous republic of Adjara; throughout the former Soviet Union (e.g. Armenia and Ukraine); and – through more recent emigration – in Western countries such as Germany, the Netherlands, and the United States. However, the exact number of Abkhaz speakers in these countries remains unknown due to a lack of official records.

History

The earliest extant written records of the Abkhaz language are in the Arabic script, recorded by the Turkish traveller Evliya Çelebi in the 17th century.^[8] Abkhaz has been used as a literary language for only about 100 years.

Dialects

Abkhaz is generally viewed as having three major dialects:

- Abzhywa**, spoken in the Caucasus, and named after the historical area of Abzhywa (Абжьыа), sometimes referred to as **Abzhui**, the Russified form of the name (*Abzhuiski dialekt*, derived from the Russian form of the name for the area, Абжа).
- Bzyb** or Bzyp, spoken in the Caucasus and in Turkey, and named after the Bzyb (Abkhazian: Бзыб) area.

Abkhaz	
Abkhazian	
Аԥсуа бызшәа; аԥсшәа Apsua byzshwa; apsshwa	
apsua bazʼa აფსუა ბაზა Аԥсуа бызшәа	
Native to	Abkhazia and Abkhaz diaspora
Ethnicity	Abkhazians
Native speakers	190,110 (2014–2015) ^[1]
Language family	Northwest Caucasian - Abazgi Abkhaz
Dialects	Abzhywan Bzyb Sadz
Writing system	Cyrillic (Abkhaz alphabet) Historically: Arabic, Latin, Georgian
Official status	
Official language in	 Republic of Abkhazia; ^[a] Autonomous Republic of Abkhazia, Georgia
Language codes	
ISO 639-1	ab (https://www.loc.gov/standards/iso639-2/php/langcode_s_name.php?iso_639_1=ab) Abkhazian
ISO 639-2	abk (https://www.loc.gov/standards/iso639-2/php/langcode_s_name.php?code_ID=2) Abkhazian
ISO 639-3	abk Abkhazian
Glottolog	abkh1244 (http://glottolog.org/resource/1anguoid/id/abkh1244) Abkhaz ^[2]

- **Sadz**, nowadays spoken only in Turkey, formerly also spoken between the rivers Bzyp and Khosta.

The literary language is based on the Abzhywa dialect.

Phonology

Abkhaz has a very large number of consonants (58 in the literary dialect), with three-way voiced/voiceless/ejective and palatalized/labialized/plain distinctions. By contrast, the language has only two phonemically distinct vowels, which have several allophones depending on the palatal and/or labial quality of adjacent consonants.

Phonemes in **green** are found in the Bzyp and Sadz dialects of Abkhaz, but not in Abzhywa; phonemes in **blue** are unique to the Bzyp dialect.



Consonants																			
		Labial	Alveolar		Palato-alveolar		Alveolo-palatal		Retro-flex	Velar			Uvular					Pharyngeal	
			plain	lab.	plain	lab.	plain	lab.		pal.	plain	lab.	pal.	plain	lab.	phar.	lab. + phar.	plain	lab.
Nasal		m	n																
Stop	voiceless	p	t	tʷ						kʲ	k	kʷ							
	voiced	b	d	dʷ						ɡʲ	ɡ	ɡʷ							
	ejective	pʼ	tʼ	tʷʼ						kʲʼ	kʼ	kʷʼ	qʲʼ	qʼ	qʷʼ				
Affricate	voiceless		t͡s		t͡ʃ		t͡ɕ	t͡ɕʷ	t͡ɕʰ										
	voiced		d͡z		d͡ʒ		d͡ʒ̥	d͡ʒ̥ʷ	d͡ʒ̥ʰ										
	ejective		t͡sʼ		t͡ʃʼ		t͡ɕʼ	t͡ɕʷʼ	t͡ɕʰʼ										
Fricative	voiceless	f	s		ʃ	ʃʷ	ɕ	ɕʷ	ɕʰ				χʲ	χ	χʷ	χʰ	χʰʷ	ħ	ħʷ
	voiced	v	z		ʒ	ʒʷ	ʒ̥	ʒ̥ʷ	ʒ̥ʰ				ʁʲ	ʁ	ʁʷ				
Approximant			l					ɥ											
Trill			r																

Vowels			
	Front	Central	Back
Semivowel/Close	j~i	(ɨ)	w~u
Mid	(e)	ə	(o)
Open		a	

Grammar

Abkhaz is typologically classified as a polysynthetic and agglutinative language. Like all other Northwest Caucasian languages, Abkhaz has an extremely complex verbal system coupled with a very simple noun system. Viacheslav Chirikba has characterized Abkhaz as a "verbcentric language", as the verb occupies the central place in Abkhaz morphology.

Abkhaz is an ergative-absolutive language that distinguishes just two cases, the instrumental and the adverbial.

Writing system

Abkhaz has used the Cyrillic script since 1862. The first alphabet was a 37-character Cyrillic alphabet invented by Baron Peter von Uslar. In 1909 a 55-letter Cyrillic alphabet was used. A 75-letter Latin script devised by a Russian/Georgian linguist Nikolai Marr lasted for 2 years 1926–1928 (during the Latinization campaign). The Georgian script was adopted and used in 1938–54 years after was restored the initial Cyrillic alphabet designed in 1892 by Dmitry Gulia together with Konstantin Machavariani and modified in 1909 by Aleksey Chochua.

Cyrillic script:

А а [a]	Б б [b]	В в [ʋ]	Г г [g]	Гь гь [gʲ]	Гə гə [gʷ]	Ҝ ҟ [ɣ/ɣʲ]	Ҭ ҭ [ɬʲɣʲ]
Ҩ Ҩə [ɣʷ/ɣʷʲ]	Д д [d]	Дə дə [dʷ]	Е е [a/jə]	Ж ж [ʒ]	Жь жь [ʒʲ]	Жə жə [ʒʷ]	З з [z]
З з [dz]	Зə зə [dʒʷ]	И и [i/ɨ̟ʲ]	К к [kʲ]	Кь кь [kʲʲ]	Кə кə [kʲʷ]	Қ қ [kʰ]	Қь қь [kʰʲ]
Қə қə [kʷʰ]	К к [qʲ]	Кь кь [qʲʲ]	Кə кə [qʲʷ]	Л л [l]	М м [m]	Н н [n]	О о [a/wa]
П п [pʲ]	Ҟ Ҟ [pʰ]	Р р [r]	С с [s]	Т т [tʲ]	Тə тə [tʲʷ]	Ҳ Ҳ [tʰ]	Ҳə Ҳə [tʰʲ]
У у [w/wɨ̟ʲ]	Ф ф [f]	Х х [x/χ]	Хь хь [xʲ/χʲ]	Хə хə [xʷ/χʷ]	Ҳ Ҳ [h]	Хə хə [hʷ]	Ц ц [t͡sʰ]
Цə цə [t͡sʰʰ]	Ц ц [t͡sʲʲ]	Цə цə [t͡sʲʲʷ]	Ч ч [t͡ʃʰ]	Ч ч [t͡ʃʲʲ]	Ҹ Ҹ [t͡ʃʰʲ]	Ҹ Ҹ [t͡ʃʲʲʲ]	Ш ш [ʃ]
Шь шь [ʃʲ]	Шə шə [ʃʲʷ]	Ы ы [ɨ̟]	Ҫ Ҫ [ɣ/ɣʲ]	Ц ц [d͡ʒ]	Ць ць [d͡ʒʲ]	Ь ь [ʲ]	Ә ә [ʷ]

Latin script:

a [a]	b [b]	c [t͡sʰ]	Ҹ [t͡sʲ]	d [d]	ḑ [dʷ]	e [ɛ]	f [f]
ҭ [ʃʷ]	g [g]	ḑ [d͡ʒ]	gɪ [gʲ]	gu [gʷ]	ḡ [ɣ ~ ɣʲ]	ḡɪ [ɣʲ ~ ɣʲʲ]	ḡu [ɣʷ ~ ɣʷʲ]
h [h]	ḡ [hʷ]	i [iː, j, jə]	j [ʒʷ]	k [kʰ]	kɪ [kʲʰ]	ku [kʷʰ]	ḡ [kʲ]
kɪ [kʲʲ]	kɪ [kʷʲ]	l [l]	m [m]	n [n]	o [o]	p [pʰ]	ḡ [pʲ]
q [qʲ]	qɪ [qʲʲ]	qu [qʷʲ]	ḡ [d͡ʒ]	r [r]	s [s]	ḡ [sʲ]	ɪ [ʃ]
t [tʰ]	ḡ [tʲʲ]	ḡ [tʷʲ]	ḡ [tʷʲʲ]	u [w, wə, uː]	v [v]	x [x/χ]	xɪ [xʲ ~ χʲʲ]
xu [xʷ ~ χʷʲ]	y [ɣ (< ɣʷ)]	z [z]	ḡ [d͡ʒʷ]	z [z]	z [d͡ʒ]	ḡ [t͡ʃʲ]	ḡ [t͡ʃʲʲ]
ḡ [z]	ḡ [t͡ʃʲʲʲ]	ḡ [t͡ʃʲʲʲʰ]	ḡ [t͡ʃʲʲʲ]	ḡ [t͡ʃʲʲʲ]	ə [ɨ̟]		

Unicode

The Latin alphabet in Abkhaz is currently not in Unicode. Its inclusion was proposed in 2011. See also:[1] (<http://www.unicode.org/L2/L2011/11360-so-viet-latin.pdf>)

Status

Both Georgian and Abkhaz law enshrines an official status of the Abkhaz language in Abkhazia.

The 1992 law of Georgia, reiterated in the 1995 [constitution](#), grants Abkhaz the status of second official language in the territory of Abkhazia — along with [Georgian](#).

In November 2007, the de facto authorities of Abkhazia adopted a new law "on the state language of the Republic of Abkhazia" that mandates Abkhaz as the language of official communication. According to the law, all meetings held by the president, parliament, and government must be conducted in Abkhaz (instead of Russian, which is currently a de facto administrative language) from 2010, and all state officials will be obliged to use Abkhaz as their language of everyday business from 2015. Some, however, have considered the implementation of this law unrealistic and concerns have been made that it will drive people away from Abkhazia and hurt the independent press due to a significant share of non-Abkhaz speakers among ethnic minorities as well as Abkhaz themselves, and a shortage of teachers of Abkhaz. The law is an attempt to amend a situation where up to a third of the ethnic Abkhaz population are no longer capable of speaking their ethnic language, and even more are unable to read or write it; instead, Russian is the language most commonly used in public life at present.^[9]

Sample text

Abkhazian: Дарбанзаалак ауаҭы дшоуп иҭы дақәиҭны. Ауаа зегь зинлеи патулеи еиқароуп. Урҭ ирымоуп ахшыҭи аламыси, дара дарагь аешьеи аешьеи реиҭш еизықазароуп.^[10]

Romanization

Darbanzaalak auauy dshoup ihy daqwithny. Auaa zegj zinlei patulei eiqaroup. Urth irymoup ahshyuyi alamysi, dara daragj aesjei aesjei reiphsh eizyqazaroup.

ISO 9 Romanization

Darbanzaalak auaðy dšoup ihy daḡáitny. Auaa zeg ' zinlei patulei eiḡaroup. Urṭ irymoup ahšyòì alamysi, dara darag ' aeš 'ei aeš 'ei reipš eizyḡazaroup.

Translation

"All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood."

Notes

- a. Abkhazia is the subject of a territorial dispute between the Republic of Abkhazia and Georgia. The Republic of Abkhazia unilaterally declared independence on 23 July 1992, but Georgia continues to claim it as part of its **own sovereign territory**. Abkhazia has received formal recognition as an independent state from 7 out of 193 **United Nations member states**, 1 of which have subsequently withdrawn their recognition.

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3. "abkhaz" (<http://oed.com/search?searchType=dictionary&q=abkhaz>). *Oxford English Dictionary* (3rd ed.). Oxford University Press. September 2005. (Subscription or **UK public library membership** (<https://www.oed.com/public/login/loggingin#withyourlibrary>) required.)
4. Laurie Bauer, 2007, *The Linguistics Student's Handbook*, Edinburgh
5. "Documentation for ISO 639 identifier: abk" (https://www.loc.gov/standards/iso639-2/php/langcodes_name.php?code_ID=2). ISO 639-2 Registration Authority - Library of Congress. Retrieved 2017-07-04. "Name: Abkhazian"
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External links

- Introduction, basic phrases and grammar and texts (<http://www.abyzshwa.narod.ru/>)
- Abkhaz alphabet and pronunciation (Omniglot) (<http://www.omniglot.com/writing/abkhaz.htm>)
- Abkhaz entry in LanguageServer (University of Graz) (<http://languageserver.uni-graz.at/ls/lang?id=3043>)
- Abkhaz at Language Museum (<http://www.language-museum.com/encyclopedia/a/abkhaz.php>)
- Example of Abkhaz language (<http://www.kapba.de/A-Abtsara.html>)
- Abkhaz-Russian On-Line Dictionary (<https://web.archive.org/web/20120426090514/http://abc.marlamuter.ru/index.php/list/abkhaz/1.xhtml>)
- Ancient Adyghe Abkhaz–Abaza Ubykh alphabet (<http://www.ethnic-cinema-country.ru/kalligrafia/>)
- Abkhaz basic lexicon at the Global Lexicostatistical Database (http://starling.rinet.ru/cgi-bin/response.cgi?root=new100&morpho=0&ba_sename=new100\ncclwcc&first=0)
- Abkhaz text corpus (<http://baltoslav.eu/apsua/index.php?mova=en>)
- Recordings of Abkhaz (<http://archive.phonetics.ucla.edu/Language/ABK/abk.html>)
- World Atlas of Language Structures information on Abkhaz (http://wals.info/languoid/lect/wals_code_abk)

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